



TITLE:

Reduplication in Tibeto Burman Languages of South Asia

AUTHOR(S):

Abbi, Anvita

CITATION:

Abbi, Anvita. Reduplication in Tibeto Burman Languages of South Asia.
東南アジア研究 1990, 28(2): 171-181

ISSUE DATE:

1990-09

URL:

<http://hdl.handle.net/2433/56401>

RIGHT:

Reduplication in Tibeto Burman Languages of South Asia

Anvita ABBI*

Introduction

Duplicating a morpheme or a word to coin new words and express various grammatical aspects is a common phenomenon with the languages of the Tibeto Burman (T.B.) family of South East and South Asia. The author in the present paper investigates into Reduplicated Structures (RS) existing in T.B. languages spoken in the Indian subcontinent. The Indian T.B. languages are surrounded by Indo Aryan languages on the one hand and are affected by a strong areal pull on the other. The combinational factors of retention and diffusion have produced structures belonging to South Asian 'areal universals' along with those which identify these languages as of T.B. stock.

Among two major kinds of reduplication available to these languages; i.e. morphological and lexical it is the latter which is discussed here. On the basis of the morpho-semantic structures the T.B. languages can be divided into main verb reduplicating and non main verb reduplicating languages. The various reduplicated structures discussed in the paper cover a wide syntactico-semantic range from aspect (simultaneity, continuity, iteration etc.) to modification (diminution, em-

phasis, accentuation, distribution, manner etc.) as well as perform important syntactic relations such as anaphora manifested in reflexives and reciprocals. Data is drawn from Meitei, Paite, Thado, Kabui, Taizang, Mizo, Lahuli, and Gangte.

'Reduplication' in general stands for repetition of all or part of a lexical item carrying a semantic modification, e.g., Gangte: *səl* 'boys' and *səl səl* 'boys boys' or *ol* 'slow' and *ol ol* 'slow slow'. Reduplication may also refer to the iteration of syllables which constitute a single word/lexeme. For instance, kinship *mama* 'mother' or onomatopoeias such as *təp təp* 'rain pattering', Mizo *olep olep* 'sticky' are instances of reduplication in spite of the fact that part which is repeated is neither a lexical item nor a part of a lexical item. It acquires this status only after it is being reduplicated. In such cases the repetition of syllables itself constitutes a word or a lexical item. I would like to term them 'Expressives' (following Diffloth [1976]) and define it by saying that expressives are instances of Morphological Reduplication (as opposed to lexical reduplication considered later in the paper) where the minimally meaningful and segmentally indivisible morphemes are constituted of iterated syllables. Thus, the base and the iterated part together constitute a single morpheme which is also a lexeme. Onomatopoeic constructions, imitatives, sound symbolisms, mimic words are all ex-

* Centre of Linguistics and English, School of Languages, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi-110067, India

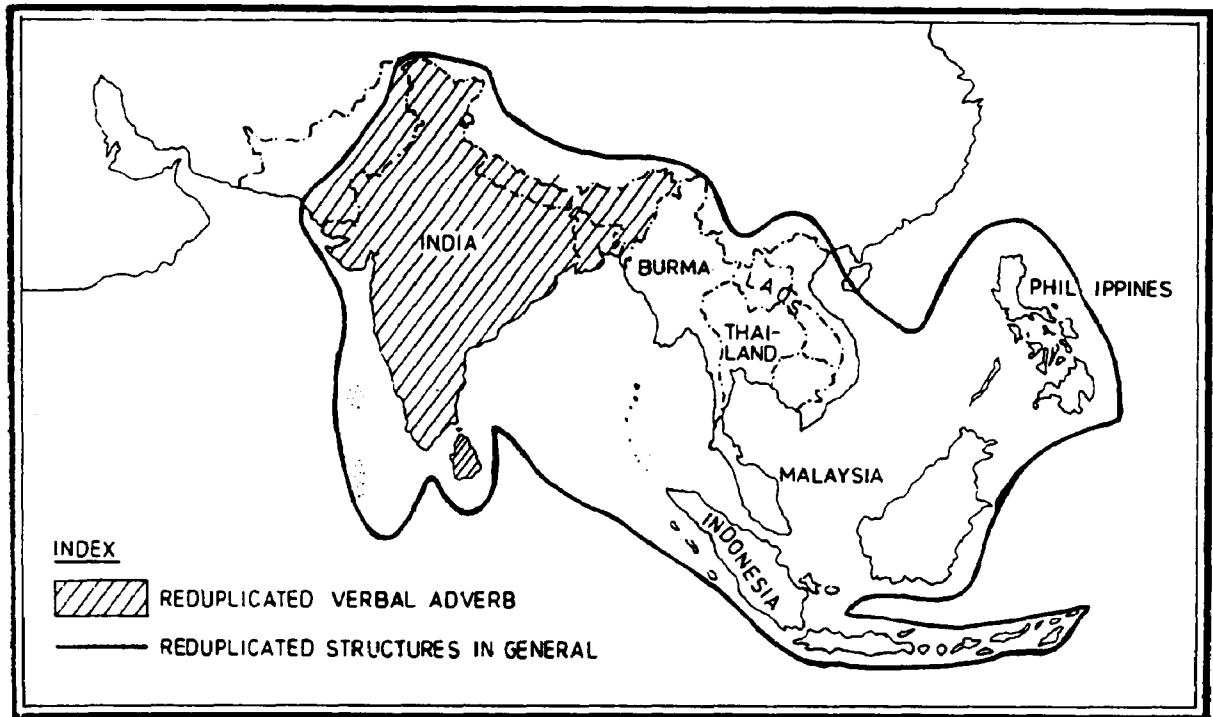


Fig. 1 Distribution of Reduplicated Structures in Indo Southeast Asia

amples of morphological reduplication as the entire repeated structure here signifies a given meaning without allowing any morphological cuts within. Meitei *u?u?* 'monkey chattering'; *grən grən* 'thundering sounds', *khe khe* 'laughing sounds', Mizo *klek klek* 'rain pattering', (nui) *hek hek* 'laughing sounds', *tchek tchek* 'jingling sounds' are instances of acoustic noises manifested in Expressives.

Expressives are generally used to emote all the five senses of human perception in South Asian languages. Tibeto Burman languages, spoken in the mountains of North East of India, show ample evidences of expressives which give them group identity with the rest of the Indian languages. Any reference to Tibeto Burman further in the paper refers exclusively to the languages of this family spoken in India.

Contrary to morphological reduplication,

the Lexical Reduplication can be constructed by three different processes which are instances of either partial or complete reduplication. These processes are: (1) Echo formation; (2) Compounding and (3) Word reduplication. I will be concentrating on the third type in this paper though the other two also demand a serious observation in the T.B. languages. An important aspect of morphological and lexical reduplication is that each reduplicated structure (RS) constitutes a *single lexical category* and thus any additives to a single word may also be added to any RS. As stated earlier, word reduplication (WR) can either be partial or complete. Third type, i.e. discontinuous lexical reduplication (DLR) where two reduplicated words are disjoined by an intervening syllable or a morpheme also exists in Tibeto Burman. Complete word reduplication (CWR) refers to all those

reduplicated structures which consist of two identical (bimodal) iterated words. Thus, any sequence of phonological units comprising a word may be repeated once (or twice in some rare cases). Hence X may become XX. I am going to discuss CWR at length in the rest of the paper. Discontinuous lexical reduplication will be considered marginally only. For convenience, phonological aspects regarding reduplicated words are not taken into account. My main concern is to establish the presence of such structures in these languages and explore the semantic nuances that they emote. What is the most important

here is to see whether these languages show any signs of sharing areal features of South Asian languages, and if they do, to what extent.

Structural Spread and the RS

The RSs occur in all parts of speech, be it a noun, verb, adverb or adjective. Pronouns are also reduplicated in a large number of T.B. languages. Table 1 will give us a good indication of the structural spread of the RS in Tibeto Burman. Most of the pronominal reduplication is in DLR form in these languages.

Table 1 Word Reduplication in Tibeto Burman

| Languages | Nouns | Pronouns | Adverbs/RVADV | Adjectives | Verbs | Quantifiers |
|-----------|--|--|--|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
| Gangte | po-səl səl 'boys boys' | kei leʔ kei 'I to myself' | ol ol 'slow slow' ciʔ ciʔ 'walking walking' | phət-a-phət 'good good' | ne ne hi 'eating eating' | niʔ niʔ 'two two' |
| Meitei | nupi nupi-gəi 'only ladies' | isa-ne isa-bu I + Agt I + Acc (myself) | thu-nə thu-nə 'fast fast' cən-nə cən-nə 'running running' | əcu əcu-bə 'large large' | — | əni əni-nə 'two two' |
| Paite | In ten ten 'houses houses' | ə-ma:ʔ-leʔ-ə-ma:ʔ 'he and himself' | əkɪn əkɪn 'fast fast' tu tu-lai 'sitting sitting' | əhoi əhoi 'good good' | — | — |
| Kabui | tumai tumai 'only ladies' kai kai 'house house' | ai-a 'I I' | kətom kətom 'hurriedly hurriedly' duŋ duŋe 'sitting' | gai gai-mai 'good good' | — | kə-nai-nai 'two two' |
| Thado | In Ina 'house house' | | loI loI 'fast fast' pum pum In 'talking talking' | ətha ətha 'new new' | — | — |
| Taizang | — | kei-ka 'I I' | mə-məʔ 'now now' pa-pai 'going going' | ə-sa-sa 'hot-hot' | tu tuŋ 'reach reach' | |

Reduplication and Aspect

Though languages of this group employ various morphological devices to indicate aspect yet reduplication of verbs used as adverbs i.e. Reduplicated Verbal Adverbs (RVADV) is also very prevalent in Tibeto Burman spoken in South Asia. The structural configuration is such that any verb is reduplicated in its base form and then is followed by the main verb (MV) of the sentence. The entire construction RVADV + MV manifests any of the following aspects:

- a. Simultaneity
- b. Continuity
- c. Iterativeness
- d. Non Precipitation

Simultaneity

Simultaneity identifies synchronization of two events/actions (non-states) at a particular point of time which in turn may signal:

- (A) the completion of both events or actions together; or
- (B) protraction of one of the events/actions; or
- (C) continuity of two events for a certain period of time.

The two events or actions discussed here are represented by RVADV and MV. The RVADV indicating aspects are italicized in the examples. Literal translation of sentences in various languages is given immediately before the free English translation. The word order of these languages is of SOV type where RVADV precedes MV.

1.

- Meitei məhak kwa *yon-nə yon-nə* waŋaŋ
ləmmi
Paite əma kuwa *əjuək əjuək* laIn əpau
Lahuli du pan *landa landa* priri
he betels selling selling spoke
'He spoke while selling betels'

These examples employ two punctual verbs to show the synchronization of two events/actions like the verb of 'say' and 'sell' which get completed at the same time. It may happen that RVADV is non punctual and MV is punctual (i.e. is not in a position to be further continued) and at a particular point of time the two coincide. Consider:

2.

- Gangte naopəŋ pa cu ciʔ *kəm kəm*
inəpukt'a:
Kabui ganmaina *taʔlaŋ taʔlaŋ-na*
bunkai kəthe
Meitei ənaŋ ədu *cət-nə cət-nə* tu-rəm-y
Paite naupan *pai pai* əketa
boy walking walking fell down
'The boy fell down while walking'

The third kind of simultaneity aspect is designated when both RVADV and MV are non punctual types which occur simultaneously for a certain period of time (example (3)). Consider example (4) where the two actions are undertaken by two distinct agents (subjects); i.e. one undertakes the action manifested in the RVADV; the other whose action is manifested in the MV.

3.

Kabui kəmai pəkʔ pəkʔna šac
Meitei məhak cən-nə cən-nə ɲaŋ ləm-n
Paite əma tai tai la: In əpau
he running running spoke
'He spoke while running'

4.

Meitei əi-nə unə unə məhak iraknə rəm-
mi
Paite kaʔ et et lai Inətumta
Kabui ai hou ten tenna kəmai phlənka
gəne
Lahuli giu khanda khanda du dube-gi-iti
I see see he drowned
'He drowned as I watched
(helplessly)'

Continuity

Continuation or duration of an event might be indicated by RVADV or by employing MV in its reduplicated form. Interestingly, languages like Gangte offers both the options while the languages of the rest of India (barring some of the Austroasiatic languages) have only one recourse for continuity, i.e. RVADV. Thus Gangte has (5) as well as (6).

5.

din pumin thu agen agen hi
standing while words say say
'He lectured while standing'

6.

coki: aʔka cucui
chair on I sitting sitting
'I have been sitting on this chair (for a long time)'

If the verbal adverb is followed by the process verb such as 'get tired' like in example (7) then RVADV signifies *causal* effect. If the MV is not a process verb but say action verb then RVADV signifies *manner* as in sentence (5) above. Consider (7) which alternates with constructions like (6) above.

7.

Meitei məhak fəm-nə fəm-nə cok th-
rəm-y
Paite əma tutu-lai əpukta
he sitting sitting got tired
'He got tired of sitting (for too long)'

Iteration

The aspect of iteration refers to the concept of repeated occurrence of an event/action at short intervals of time. The action which is repeated several times is manifested in the reduplicated form. Consider:

8.

Thado pon l̥sɔp l̥sɔp lən əlho poI
Kabui phai sourəŋg sourəŋg khouroi
soukathe
Gangte puna: sɔp sɔp a əsɔpsete
Clothes wash wash got torn
'Clothes got torn off by excessive washing'

All T.B. languages reduplicate the verb signifying an action which is repeated several times and in this respect the construction is iconic. Hence an English sentence like 'He got tired of listening to the song (*again and again*)' would naturally be translated by using the reduplicated form of the verb 'to listen'.

Consider:

9.

Paite əma la nai *khIa khIa* In əpukta
 Lahuli du gure *rewa rewa* chajilya
 he song listen listen got
 tired/bored
 'He got tired listening to the
 song'
 Meitei məsi mənoŋ-də *hay-nə hay-nə*
 in spite mine ask ask
 məhaknə kəriemtə taw-de
 he work do never
 'In spite of my asking him again
 and again to do the work, he
 didn't (my pursuance was of no
 avail)'

The two verbs involved in iterative aspect are semantically related to each other in *causal* or *manner* relationship. This is unlike the case of the verbs involved in the simultaneity aspect which may be independently motivated.

As said earlier, most of the T.B. languages of Indian subcontinent do not reduplicate final (main) verbs to indicate any of the aspectual elements. Gangte seems to be an exception here. My recent research on T.B. languages reveals that Taizang, a language primarily spoken in Burma but also represented in India by a few thousand speakers reduplicate the main verbs for continuity. This revelation promotes a researcher to propose two types of T.B. languages in South Asia—one which permits final verb reduplication and the other which does not. The final verb reduplication in the T.B. languages may indicate several types of aspects in addition to continuity.

For instance, consider the following examples from Taizang:

10.

lai sak ɔŋ *tu tuŋ*
 the letter comes comes
 'The letter keeps coming' (iterative)

11.

nəŋ ən *nɛ nɛ* mɔ
 what you eat eat rice
 'Do you keep eating rice?' (continuity)

12.

əmo əkə-kəp
 he/she cries cries
 'He/she is crying (continuously)' (continuity)

13.

kei curacanpur -a ka *pa-pai*
 I Churachandpur towards I go go
 'I go to Churachandpur very often' (iterative)

The main verb *pa-pai* can also be used as RVADV to modify another non reduplicated verb just as in other T.B. languages:

14.

Curacanpur *pa-pai* kIn kIn
 Churachandpur go go I+Acc I+Acc
 iŋ
 bores
 'Visiting Churachandpur (again and again)
 bores me'

Non Precipitation

The concept of non precipitation is related

to the concept of antithesis or counter-proposal. When the semantic constructs of the MV are antithetical to the constructs of the other verb in the sentence an idea of non precipitation is signified. To put it differently, when the main event/action, represented by the MV occurs on the verge of the operation of another event/action manifested by the RVADV, it puts a stop to the operation of the latter. The result is that the action signified by the RVADV never takes place. Consider example (15).

15.

Gangte *go əki go zina ajude poI*
Kabui *tIn luni kum luni kum na*
luməgge
Meitei *non tage tage təudunə ləire*
Paite *khoa ənimnim laIn əju kei*
Thado *van ənim ənimi gowan əzupoi*
rain happen happen but did not
happen
‘It was going to rain but did not’

Reduplication and Modification

Under this section of the paper I will be primarily concerned with the nominal modification and its manifestations in the reduplicated forms. Reduplicated modifiers of nouns used for either relative states such as quality, colour, taste, size, etc. or for non relative states such as shape of an item which signify either *accentuation* of the state under consideration or *attenuation* of that state. It is the former, i.e. accentuation, which is widely prevalent in T.B. languages while the latter, i.e. attenuation is either not available or wherever it does occur exists marginally such

as in the case of Meitei. If the noun to be modified is in plural then an additional meaning or ‘*distributive*’ is added to the reduplicated modifier. Thus: Gangte *thup thup*; Kabui *tiəŋ tiəŋ*, Paite *əthuk əthuk* signify ‘very sour’ and not sourish which Meitei *əsin əsin-bə* might depending upon the intonation. Surprisingly, Thado does not reduplicate taste or colour modifiers at all. Consider (16) where both accentuation and distributiveness are signified by the reduplicated modifier.

16.

Kabui *kəmai dlek šem šem mai tupi nae*
Meitei *məhak-ki əsəŋ əsəŋbə tupi yam-*
nə ləi
Paite *əma kIyən a? lUkhu əpoləpol*
aom
He + Dat. blue blue caps
‘He has many blue (blue) caps’

Surprisingly, Gangte does not offer parallel construction here though the language does give marginal evidences of colour modifiers in reduplicated forms. Reduplicated colour modifiers become further rare when they are supposed to accompany singular nouns. Hence ‘green green sari’ is a common expression in other Indian languages but not in Tibeto Burman. Meitei speakers, at times, have been noticed to use such constructions but very marginally and only to emphasize the colour ‘green’ not to attenuate it (unlike in many Indo Aryan languages when the reduplicated ‘green’ would signify ‘greenish’).

‘Size’ and ‘quality’ modifiers have varying patterns in T.B. when reduplicated. Examples of ‘large large’ or ‘good good’ are

more prevalent in Meitei and Kabui than in Thado and Gangte.

Consider:

17.

Kabui kəmik dai dai-e naiye

Paite əma mIt ələt əllənən ənəi
his eyes large large are
'He has large (large) eyes'

Meitei məhak ki əcəu-əcəu bə huy ləi

He+Dat. big big houses
'He has big (big) houses'

In all, Thado makes least use of reduplicated nominal modifiers, and Meitei uses most. Perhaps, the Aryanization is most prominent in Meitei because of its interaction with other Indo Aryan languages. Whatever the reason is, because of these and other structures available in Meitei, it constitutes an integral and an important part of the Indian area which is defined as a 'linguistic area'.

The nominal modifiers of quantifiers type are not very commonly reduplicated though again, some instances are found, and this particular fact separates the T.B. languages from the rest of the languages of Indian linguistic area.

Verbal Modifiers

Adverbs of 'manner' are more common in their reduplicated forms than any other adverbs. Constructions such as Gangte *tək tək*; Kabui *kətom kətom*; Meitei *thu-nə thu-nə*; Paite *əkin a: kin* and Thado *loI loI* meaning 'hurriedly/fast' are attested in all T.B. languages.

Nominal and Pronominal Reduplication

All T.B. languages reduplicate the nouns for 'distributive' or 'exclusive' meanings. Consider (18) for the former and (19) for the latter use. Paite reduplicates the plural marker *teŋ* instead of the noun *In* 'house'.

18.

Kabui kəmai rui kai kai khou təle

Meitei məhaknə yum yum cət-tunə cak-ni phi-ni-rəmi

Paite huəi In teŋ teŋ a? pain əthon amu aut

Thado əma In Ina xUddən əci
he house house goes and alms asks
'He goes house to house to beg'

19.

Kabui tumai tumai kaithlen tətle
girls girls market went
'Only girls went to the market'

As can be seen, Gangte does not make use of reduplication in this case. However, *nu mei mei* 'girls only' and *pa səlsəl* 'boys only' is not uncommon in Gangte. The restriction on its occurrence seems to be pragmatically or semantically governed.

An important and interesting feature of T.B. languages is to use reduplicated pronoun for reflexivity and reciprocalness.

Reflexives/Reciprocals in Mizo and Meitei

The strategy to form reflexives in Mizo is to

have a combination of a verbal reflexive *in* and reduplicated bound pronoun. (Tishta Bagchi [1988] has considered the phenomenon in detail.)

20.

zova (-cu:) *a-ma:ʔ leʔ a-ma:ʔ a-*
zova Loc. he Int. and he Int. III sg. AGR
in hila
 VRx injured
 'Zova injured himself'

21.

kei-ma:ʔ leʔ kei-ma:ʔ dārthlalaŋ-aʔ ka-
 I Int. and I Int. mirror Loc. I sg.
in-hmu:
 VRx see
 'I saw myself in the mirror'

[Bagchi 1988]

As can be seen, the reduplicated pronoun has an intervening conjunct giving us discontinuous lexical reduplication. It is to be noted that for reflexivity the reduplicated pronominal is optional, perhaps because the subject is traceable by the agreement marker. An interesting observation is that if the subject is plural then the VRx *in* may also indicate reciprocalness. In other words, the following sentence could be ambiguous:

22.

kan-in ti- buwai
 I pl. VRx Caus disturb
 (a) We disturbed each other
 (b) We disturbed ourselves (individually)

The (22) sentence can be disambiguated by using a reduplicated pronominal for the

intended meaning in (22b).

Consider:

23.

kei-ma:ʔ -ni: leʔ kei-ma:ʔ -ni:
 I Int. pl. and I Int. pl.
kan -in- ti buwai
 I pl. VRx CAUS disturb
 'We disturbed ourselves' (individually)

This proves that (i) *in* can be either reflexive or reciprocal; (ii) use of reduplicated pronominal indicates only reflexivity and not reciprocalness; (iii) omitted pronominal subject will render the sentence ambiguity (provided the omitted subject is plural).

Meitei also offers examples of RS in reflexive constructions.

Consider:

24.

a: isanə isa: bu fujəi
 I I+Agnt I+Acc. hit
 'I hit myself'

25.

məkhoi məsa: məksin bhu hatokare
 they they to them kill
 'They killed themselves'

Like many languages of the family, Meitei also makes use of the RS in reciprocal constructions.

26.

məkhoi əmməgə-məmməgə nunksi nəi
 they one one love
 'They love each other'

The Tibeto Burman trait of the use of reduplicated pronominals for reflexive use is shared by the Dravidian languages. It would be interesting to investigate into the causes of such structural similarity as Dravidian substratum effect can be ruled out immediately for obvious reasons (i.e. no Dravidian language is spoken in the vicinity for hundreds of miles nor is there any economic or political dominance of Dravidians or Tibeto Burmans). One could perhaps look into the 'historical convergence' to explain such shared structures though it would be very hard to prove any links between the two in the absence of any textual evidences.

Interestingly, T.B. languages show structural affinity to the Indian linguistic area as well as they keep themselves apart from this area by retaining structures peculiar to these languages such as reduplication of the main verbs. I had earlier proposed (Abbi [1987; 1990 forthcoming]) that languages which reduplicate MVs ideally should not use explicator compound verbs as the latter seem to have originated from the reduplication of the MVs and thus semantically are very close to the functions of the explicator compound verbs (for details see Abbi [1990 forthcoming]). On the basis of the availability of the two structures which seem to be mutually exclusive we can certainly group T.B. languages into two distinct groups—one which uses MV reduplication and no explicator compound verbs and the other which has explicator compound verbs but no reduplication of MVs. Reduplication of the verbs in the latter type of languages are used as modifiers of the main verb as discussed in this paper. Languages of the Gangte, Taizang type catch the attention

of a linguist by the heavy occurrence of the RS in a single sentence where each RS implies the presence of various distinct semantic units. Thus in the following sentence from Taizang one could reduplicate every grammatical category for various meanings.

27.

kei kə pə poi nəŋ- nə sna se se-m
 I I go go you you work do-do decl.
 I am leaving. You are continuously doing
 your work.
 (Since you are busy doing your work I am
 leaving)

To conclude, most of the RSs found in T.B. languages share the semantic constructs of reduplicated structures across Indian languages and thus constitute part of 'areal universals'. Thado among all the T.B. languages seem to be an island in the Indian linguistic area as it neither shares many syntactico-semantic features of RSs with the T.B. languages nor with other non T.B. languages of India. The position of Gangte and Taizang falls in between the two. Further research in other Indian languages specially in Munda group might expose a typology of reduplication we are not aware of yet. I am tempted to mention that Kharia and Khasi (Austroasiatic languages of India) have been noted by the author to have reduplication of the MVs.

Finally, Meitei seems to be the most Aryanized language among all other languages of its Tibeto Burman group as the typology of the RS of this language is similar to that of the other Indo Aryan languages of the country.

Colophon

Data was collected by the author in the area of Imphal, the capital of Manipur (India). The author is grateful to all her informants for their patience and cooperation.

References

- Abbi, A. 1985. Reduplicative Structures: A Phenomenon of the South Asian Linguistic Area. In *For Gordon H. Fairbanks*, edited by Veneeta Z. Acson; and Richard L. Leeds. Oceanic Linguistics Special Publication No. 20. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- _____. 1987. Reduplicative Structures in South Asian Languages: A Phenomenon of Linguistic Area. *U. G. C. Report*.
- _____. 1990 (forthcoming). *Reduplication in South Asian Languages: An Areal, Typological, and Historical Study*. Delhi: Allied Publishers.
- Abbi, A.; and Mithilesh K. Mishra 1987. Aspectual Elements of Simultaneity and Iteration in Indian Languages: A Case for an Areal Universal. *Studies in the Linguistic Sciences* 17 (1): 1-14.
- Bagchi, Tishta. 1988. Reflexives, Reciprocals and Intensifiers in Mizo. M. A. dissertation, Delhi University.
- Diffloth, Gerard. 1976. Expressives in Semai. In *Austroasiatic Studies*, edited by N. Jenner; L. C. Thompson; and Stanley Starosta. Special Publication No. 13. Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press.
- Emeneau, M. B. 1956. India as a Linguistic Area. *Language* 32: 3-16. (Reprinted in Emeneau [1980: 105-125]).
- _____. 1980. *Language and Linguistic Area*. Essays by Murray B. Emeneau, selected and introduced by Anwar S. Dil. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Harrison, S. P. 1973. Reduplication in Micronesian Language. *Oceanic Linguistics* 12(1.2): 407-454.
- Rabel, Lili 1968. Redundant Expressions in Khasi. In *Studies in Indian Linguistics*, edited by Bh. Krishnamurti. Poona.